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Our Nurses. Our Future. Our Mental Health

During our lifetime we all face challenging times which affect our wellbeing and mental health in diverse ways. And it is not only us as individuals, but also our families and communities are affected by these challenges. Often support and help we receive from these networks are enough, but this kind of support is not always available or enough, which leads to help-seeking in the formal health care system.

In many European countries the health care system is built as a stepwise continuity from primary to specialized services. Early support and care are essential in mental health challenges to prevent and minimize stigmatization, human suffering and costs of care. Therefore, professionals working in primary health care, the first level of health care system, have an important role to provide mental health care according to the capabilities and competences they have. High-quality specialized services should be available if the care provided in this level is not sufficient. Nurses are the biggest professional group working in all these different levels of service system; their role in promotive and preventive actions as well as in care and rehabilitation is crucial.

This time with climate change, pandemic, war in Europe and economic uncertainty has shown the value of nurses in many ways, especially with mental health challenges, but at the same time many nurses have intention to leave or has already left the profession. The current shortage of nurses and other professionals in mental health services have already raised serious concerns as mental health is not always the most popular field in health care. To change this unwanted development, we need to provide nurses with visions for the future and career possibilities, and to ensure that they are able to use their full professional potential. Master's degree education for mental health nurses, leading to advanced practice mental health nurse (APMHN) role in practice might be one career path option. These educations already exist in several European countries and some countries are in the process of developing these educations.

To support this development of advanced practice mental health nurse education as well as the development of the mental health service systems the first European book "Advanced Practice in Mental Health Nursing – A European Perspective" was published late 2022 by editors from three different European countries. Authors of the book as well as the providers of the case examples are European mental health nursing educators and academics contributing to this European development with their texts. This book is based on the human rights approach, participation and recovery, all considered as fundamental in high-quality mental health care. It is time for advanced level mental health nurses to make these approaches reality in mental health care and to step forward as experts and leaders in shaping our mental health systems for a better future.

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